



United States Church and Cemetery Records

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This class is designed to provide individuals with a basic understanding of U.S. Church Records, including the various types of records, what is contained in them, how to find an ancestor's religious denomination, and locating the records.

BASIC TYPES OF CHURCH RECORDS

- Christenings/Baptisms
- Marriages
- Burials
- Confirmations
- Communion
- Admissions and removals
- Financial records
- Sunday School lists
- Church censuses
- Church related newsletters

HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR ANCESTORS DENOMINATION

- Which church do descendants belong to?
- What is the national origin of the ancestor?
- Was there only one church in town when the ancestor lived there?
- Do family records give any clues?
 - Marriage records
 - Obituaries
 - Family histories
 - Cemeteries
 - Family Bibles

Do funeral home, cemetery, or sexton records give additional clues? If you find the name of the pastor who performed the marriage or funeral, check local histories or city directories to determine the denomination of the pastor. Then check the records for that church.

History of United States Denominations

Baptist

- Started in Rhode Island in the colonial era
- Strongest in the Mid-Atlantic states and the Southern states
- Largest Protestant denomination by the early 1800s until about 1820
- Again became largest after 1920

Methodist

- By 1850, about one-third of American Protestants were Methodists
- From 1820 to 1920, Methodism was the largest Protestant denomination

Roman Catholic

- Began in the following states:
- Florida – 1565
- Southwest – 1598
- Maryland – by 1649
- Louisiana – early 1700s
- Large cities

Congregational Church (Puritans, Separatists, Disciples of Christ, United Church of Christ, Unitarian Church

- Started in Massachusetts in 1620 with the Puritans
- Many groups, such as Puritans, Separatists, and Independents
- New England pre-1850 was mostly Congregational, except Rhode Island
- State church of Connecticut until 1818
- Several groups later united and became one of these churches:
 - Disciples of Christ
 - Congregational Christian Churches
 - United Church of Christ
 - Unitarian Universalist Association

Anglican Church

- Began in Virginia
- Was strong in colonial times, especially in the Southern states
- A family of autonomous churches, also known as:
 - Church of England
 - Church of Scotland
 - Church of Wales
 - Church of Ireland
 - Episcopal
 - Protestant Episcopal Church

Presbyterian

- Started in the 1600s
 - Brought to U.S. by immigrants from Scotland and Northern Ireland

- Strongest in:
 - New York
 - Pennsylvania
 - New Jersey
 - Delaware
 - Southern states

Society of Friends/Quakers

- Started in the late 1600s
- Brought to U.S. by immigrants from England, Wales, and Germany
- Strongest in:
 - Pennsylvania near Philadelphia
 - New England
 - Mid-Atlantic states
 - Southern states, especially North Carolina

After the Revolution, many left the Southern states and went to:

- Ohio
- Indiana
- Illinois

Lutheran

- In the U.S., many came to Pennsylvania in the 1700s
- Brought by immigrants from
 - Germany
 - Scandinavia
 - Especially Sweden to the upper Midwest

German Pietists

- Mennonites (1683)
- Dunkards (1719)
- Brethren (1723)
- Amish (early 1700s)
- In Pennsylvania by the 1700s

Dutch Reformed

- In the U.S., started in New York City area by the mid-1600s
- Soon in New Jersey
- Mainly immigrants from The Netherlands

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)

- Started in 1830 in New York
- Utah since 1847 has been heavily LDS
- By 1850, most were in Utah
- By 1900, strong in most western states

Jews (a religion but not a church)

- Arrived in the U.S. in the late 1800s and early 1900s
- From eastern Europe, especially Austria and Russia
- Settled mainly in large cities

Religions of Ethnic Groups

Belarus	Moldova
Czech Republic	Poland
Estonia	Russia
Hungary	Slovakia
Latvia	Ukraine
Lithuania	Yugoslavia

Major Religions in Various Areas of the United States

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| • New England | Congregational |
| • Southern States | Baptist |
| | Protestant Episcopal |
| | Anglican |
| • Maryland & Louisiana | Catholic |
| • Southwest | Catholic |
| • Pennsylvania | Lutheran |
| Quaker | |
| Mennonite | |
| Amish | |
| • New York | Dutch Reformed |
| Catholic | |
| • Utah | LDS |
| • Upper Midwest | Lutheran |
| • Alaska | Russian Orthodox |

LOCATING THE RECORDS

Check the church of attendance

- Telephone directories
- Search online
- Church mergers
- Yearbook or annual of present denomination
- Online search of church or denomination

Church ceased to exist

- Utilize all available local and denominational information
- Church clerk
- Denominational archives, libraries, historical societies
- Check for a central archive or library

FamilySearch Catalog

- Do a place search for either the town or county and then click on church records or church record indexes. Also go to Records, choose the United States or any state and then in the Filter by Collection Name box, enter the word Church.

PERSI (Periodical Source Index) available at the following places:

Findmypast available free at the FHL and many family history centers.

- Look for church records under the state and/or for local or regional periodicals
<http://search.findmypast.com/search-world-Records/periodical-source-index>
- www.heritagequestonline.com available at many local public libraries

RESOURCES ONLINE

FamilySearch Wiki

- Search by name of religion
<https://wiki.familysearch.org>

Search Engines

- Search by town, county, state and the name of the church or minister
www.google.com
www.yahoo.com
www.bing.com

Cyndis List www.cyndislist.com

- Click on “R” for Religion and Churches or choose “U” for United States, then click on a state and then Religion & Churches.

SOURCES

- *International Genealogical Index*
- Encyclopedias
- Histories of city/town/county
- *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*, by Val Greenwood (US/Can 973 D27g 2000)
- *Source Book and Bibliographical Guide for American Church History*, 1921. (US/Can 973 K2ms)
- *A Survey of American Church Records*, 1978 (US/Can 973 K2k)
- *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, 1985, by Frank Mead and Samuel Hill (US/Can 973 K2mf)
- *Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches*, annual, (US/Can 970 K2wh)
- *The Source*, edited by Loretto D. Szucs and Sandra H. Luebking (US/Can 973 D27ts 2006)

- *Check List of Historical Records Survey Publications*, WPA. Bibliography of Research Project Reports (US/Can 973 A3c 1969)
- *The WPA Historical Records Survey: A Guide to the Unpublished Inventories, Indexes, and Transcripts*, 1980, by Loretta Hefner (US/Can 973 A1 no. 189 or fiche 6051431)

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